

Congressional Report

Panel Votes Curbs on Wiretaps

The Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday approved 11 to 15 legislation to forbid the government from wiretapping any American for national security reasons without a court order.

The measure would, for the first time make major changes in federal wiretapping procedures involving foreign intelligence information and national security investigations.

The sole dissenting vote was cast by Sen. John V. Tunney (D-Calif.) who feels the bill is still unnecessarily broad and would sanction too much wiretapping.

A compromise worked out between the Ford administration and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), the bill would require that no American be wiretapped for national security purposes unless the approval of a federal judge is first obtained.

The approval would have to be based on a showing of probable cause by the government that the target of the surveillance is an agent of a foreign power acting under that power's direction.

Kennedy said the bill would "assure, at long last, that the American people will have firm clear legislative protections governing national security wiretapping."

The legislation is the product of more than two years of hearings and debate in the Senate arising from wiretapping abuses uncovered in the Watergate scandals.